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 EXAMINATION

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 The EDINBURGH REVIEW, Numb. I.

ESPECIALLY OF
 Art. VI. Concerning Mr EBENEZER. ERSKINE's Sermons.

THE authors of this paper say in their *preface*, p. 4. "They are
 " to judge with candour, but with freedom: Opinions they are
 " only to relate, not to combat: Falsehood they will upon all
 " occasions endeavour to detect:—Principles of irreligion or disaf-
 " fection they will always endeavour to expose." How far they have
 conducted themselves by these principles, will appear from the following
 instances, besides that of the Reverend Mr *Erskine*.

Their candour may be suspected from the favourable light they cast
 upon the *Observations*, art. 15. in preference to the *Analysis*, art. 14.;
 which yet at the same time they endeavour artfully enough to disguise.
 So much, however, perspires, as may found a conjecture, that one or
 other of the authors exposed in the *Analysis*, is some how concerned in
 the *Review*: for the following words in *Review*, p. 1. "Commerce,
 " learning, the art of war, and polished manners,—have owed their
 " establishment more to the casual operation of undesigned events, than
 " to the regular execution of any concerted plan;" are somewhat simi-
 lar to that passage of Mr *Hume's Essays* quoted in the *Analysis*, p. 31.
 "Chance, therefore, or secret unknown causes, must have a great in-
 " fluence on the rise and progress of all the refined arts."

That they do not always give a bare account of opinions, without
 combating them, is evident from their rejecting the *appropriating per-
 suasion*, which the Reverend Mr *Hervey* very justly places in the nature
 of faith, as one of his "particularities of opinion;" wherein they ad-
 vise his "admirers" not "to follow him implicitly;" and, instead there-
 of, substituting a general and vague persuasion, describing faith, p. 74.
 to be no more than "a persuasion that Christ has died for all such as,
 " embracing the terms of the gospel, have recourse to him for salva-
 " tion;" a persuasion which devils themselves cannot but have: and
 yet with what propriety they call it "the received account of faith," will

be hard to tell, when no such *account* of faith is received in the *Confessions* of this, or any other reformed church.

Nor do they upon all occasions (as they promise) endeavour to detect falsehood. The *Observations* upon a pamphlet, intitled, *An Analysis, &c.* affirms, p. 1. 2. That "as free inquiry alone could at first have made way for Christianity,—it is to the same noble principle we owe the reformation.—By means of free inquiry the church of *Scotland* was originally established." The *free inquiry* intended by this author, if he speaks sense, can be no other than such an inquiry as is made by *Sopho*, and *David Hume*, Esq; whose writings he undertakes to defend from the charge laid against them by the author of the *Analysis*. It is submitted to the public, if there can be a greater reproach upon Christianity, or a more invidious censure upon the reformation, and the church of *Scotland*, than that the propagation of the one, and the establishment of the other, was owing to such licentious and Atheistical freedom, sapping the foundations of all natural and revealed religion, as is used by these authors: and yet the gentlemen concerned in this *Review*, (though they had a very fit occasion for it in their 15th article), take no manner of notice of this notorious falsehood, but rather dismiss the pamphlet with a tacit approbation.

Neither do they always endeavour (as they say in their *preface* they will do) to expose principles of irreligion and disaffection. A very irreligious principle, which they conceal, is in *Observations, &c.* p. 2. "The proper objects of censure and reproof are, not freedom of thought, but licentiousness of action; not erroneous speculations, but crimes pernicious to society." The author of the *Analysis*, addressed to the last general assembly, had said, p. 49. "That the promoters of such impious opinions" (as are contained in the writings of *Sopho*, and *David Hume*, Esq;) "deserve the very highest censure of the church." In opposition to this, the author of the *Observations* says, they deserve no censure at all; because errors in opinion, however gross, are not the proper objects of church-censure. So that, according to him, a minister or elder may be an avowed Deist, or even an Atheist in profession, and yet the church ought not to censure or reprove him, provided he be obsequious to their decisions; disobedience to which, it seems, is reckoned the only crime pernicious to ecclesiastical society. This principle, which patronizes the most damnable heresy which ever was or can be vented in the Christian church, is passed with profound silence by the authors of this *Review*.

Another principle of irreligion, and which may be easily brought over likewise to the side of disaffection, is in their summary of Mr *Hutcheson's* system of moral philosophy, prefaced by Professor *Leechman*, p. 20. 21.; where, in answer to that question, "Whether there be any particular cases in which we may be justified in departing from the ordinary rules of virtue; whether, for instance, a singular necessity may not supersede the law of veracity?" they tell us, that Mr *Hutcheson* determines in the affirmative, for the lawfulness of "telling a falsehood."

"falsehood," or even "corrupting the secretary of an hostile prince, to
 "betray the secrets of his prince, when the safety of our country re-
 "quires it, or when we can by such means prevent the effusion of much
 "innocent blood." And in extending the question a little further;
 What if, over and above lying, the preservation of our country may re-
 quire that "we employ perjury also?" and "what if we cannot save
 "our country, unless by bribing (the secretary of an hostile prince) to
 "poison or assassinate his master? Within what bounds then must the
 "plea of necessity be circumscribed? and what are those laws that ad-
 "mit no exception? This (says Mr *Hutcheson*) is one of the *desiderata*
 "(i. e. things wanting or deficient) in morals, and must probably re-
 "main so till our knowledge grows more perfect in some higher state."
 If, by the ambiguous term of *some higher state*, he means the *future*
state; then it will be found, though too late, that the law of nature, or
 moral law, as it is founded immediately on the nature of God, is of in-
 dispensable obligation; and that there will then be no occasion at all for
 these tricks and artifices to save countries and kingdoms.—"After all
 "we can suggest on this head, (continues Mr *Hutcheson*), unless some-
 "thing more precise and accurate be discovered, we must have recourse
 "to the inward feelings of an honest heart; a sense which *Aristotle* of-
 "ten tells us, must make the application of general principles to parti-
 "cular cases: and thus the truly good man, and his sentiments, must
 "be the last resort in some of these intricate cases."—In these sen-
 timents the authors of the *Review* heartily acquiesce; for they call them
 "just and sensible reflections." So that, according to them, supposing
 an *heart* to be *honest*, it is a *just and sensible reflection* to affirm, that,
 nevertheless, it can sometimes have an *inward feeling* of the lawfulness
 of lying, treason, perjury, and assassination: and supposing a man to
 be *truly good*, it is just and reasonable to think, that he may, on some
 occasions, approve of the practice of these detestable crimes. Howbeit,
 the making the sentiments of any man, how good and virtuous soever,
 the *last resort* in determining when perjury and assassination become
 lawful and warrantable actions, is nothing less than setting the creature
 above his creator, by giving a liberty to man to declare *that* to be law-
 ful at some times, which God has pronounced to be at all times highly
 sinful and hateful. If this is not a principle of irreligion, which may,
 by some, be improved to disaffection also, let the impartial judge. For
 if, under pretext of necessity, the unhinging of the law of nature, and
 the fundamental maxims of society, be put into the hands of every pre-
 tender to that absolute *whim* of disinterested benevolence, wherewith
 some would adorn and set off human nature in its present state; or,
 were this left and intrusted to the precarious dictates of mens inward
 feelings, which are notourly known to be often partial in their own fa-
 vours, no man's life or property would be safe for one half-moment.
 Upon this very principle the *Jesuits* found their most horrid and barba-
 rous cruelties and murders.

Now, since the authors of this *Review* seem to favour the above prin-
 ciples, it is less wonder, that a *collection* of the late Mr *Ebenezer Erskine's*

sermons, published by his son, does not escape their censure; it being full of sentiments of a very opposite nature. But though the model or plan of these discourses should not be suited to their taste, one would be apt to think, that they had more consulted their own honour, and perhaps after peace, if they had treated the *matter* contained in them with that becoming gravity and decency which was due to the most serious and interesting points of the Christian religion; and not poured upon such important subjects all the contempt and ignominy they were well capable of. Besides, however much they were displeased with the author himself, or the matter and manner of his sermons; with what candour, or by what rule of good manners, do they hale in a character of the *whole body* of *Seceders* from discourses compiled only by *one* of their number? "The author (say they, *p.* 33.) was generally allowed to have been one of the most eminent Seceding teachers; we have therefore thought it proper to abstract a few passages of these sermons, as specimens of the theology, eloquence, and spirit of the Seceders." It would almost tempt one to conclude, that the composer of this article is one or other of the *moderate clergymen* described in the *Characteristicks*; when it cannot be supposed, that any gentleman of honour, or minister of the church of *Scotland*, who had the least regard to his office or character, would be guilty of throwing out such barefaced burlesque upon the mysteries of our holy religion, as is here done, in the specimens given (at least) of the *theology* of the Seceders.

That the reader may have as short a view of this matter as possible, the scriptures, or our standards, shall only be produced, for justifying a few of the passages quarrelled; that the world may see at first glance, it is not Mr *Erskine's* sermons, but the *Bible* itself, or *Confession of faith* founded thereupon, that is the subject of their ridicule.—They give abstracts out of three of his sermons, as specimens of the theology of the Seceders. The first is from the discourse, intitled, *The wise virgins going forth to meet the bridegroom*. Not to mention their sneering at an use of *reproof* and *terror* on this subject, as a thing they never heard of before, when they say, "The author addresses *what he calls* an use of "reproof and terror, &c.;" it shall only be noticed, that they find fault with his reproving "those who are married to the law as a husband; "which is the case with all legalists and self-righteous persons." This needs no other answer, but that the scripture reproves them also in the strongest terms: *Gal. iii. 10. 11. As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. Confession, chap. xix. § 6.* "True believers" are "not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned." When he is describing the misery of those who are still married to the law, and not to Christ, they quarrel the epithets he gives to the law on that argument; such as, that it is "a very "rigorous husband." This would not have appeared harsh, if they had done him the justice to add his explication. "My meaning (says he) is, "that

“ that it requires perfect working, but gives no grace, no strength, “ whereby to obey :” That it is “ a cursing husband :” (what follows is), “ *Gal. iii. 10. Cursed is every one, &c. :*” That it is “ a weak husband :” (follows immediately), “ *Rom. viii. 3. What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh :*” And that it is “ a dead husband.” This also is affirmed, *Rom. vii. 2.* compared with *ψ 6.* quoted in the sermon in proof of this epithet. Upon this head they expose it as a piece of very bad theology, that “ he assures them, that “ while thus married to the law, *i. e.* while they seek life, righteousness, “ and acceptance with God, by their own personal obedience, prayers, “ repentance, &c. they are farther off from heaven than the grossest of “ sinners :” While, in the mean time, Christ himself affirms the very same doctrine in the face of the self-righteous teachers among the Jews, *Matth. xxi. 31.*—*Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you ;* as Mr Erskine himself shews in the place quarrelled.

Their next, and longest abstract, is from his sermon on *Is. lx. 8. Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows ?* Their great quarrel with this discourse is, his inquiry into “ what may be “ couched in these metaphors ;” and his explication of them, is, in their “ opinion, very singular, and very absurd ;—*e. g.* those who are said to “ fly in the text, are *believers.*” If they had copied fair, they should have said, *sinners.* “ Their flying as a cloud, denotes their multitude.” (What follows in the sermon, clears this) ; “ We find a cloud is sometimes expressive of a multitude, *Heb. xii. 1. Seeing we are compassed “ about with so great a cloud of witnesses, i. e.* such a great multitude “ of them.” All they quote next, is “ unanimity.” The author says, To fly as a cloud, “ may signify the unanimity of these converts ; they “ take all one way like a cloud flying along the heavens ; they are all “ joined into one head, Christ Jesus ; they are all knit together in one “ bond of Christian love—.” It would be perhaps tedious to follow this abstract through every article. If the author’s proofs and explications had been annexed to each of the heads they quote, they would have appeared neither *singular*, nor *absurd*. Not *singular*, because the greatest part of sound divines explain *these*, and other scripture-metaphors, the same way, by running the parallel betwixt the metaphor, and that which is designed to be resembled by it. Not *absurd*, if the similitudes are not strained, nor the application of them dissonant from the analogy of faith, whereof the impartial reader of the sermons will be a judge. One instance only, shall be adduced of false quotation. They make Mr Erskine to say, that “ God keeps open doors, and open windows in his “ house for all *sinners ;*” whereas he says only, “ for all *comers.*”

Their third abstract, *p. 36.* is, “ under the title of the breaker’s opening up all impassable passes to glory.” This is indeed the running title, wherein the author had no concern ; but that which fronts the sermon, is, “ Christ as the breaker, opening all passes to glory, that “ were impassable,” on *Micah ii. 13. The breaker is come up before them, &c.* In the application of this sermon, he has an *use* (which they formerly

merly seemed to make a jest of) "by way of *terror* to all the wicked and ungodly world, who are living in a state of sin and rebellion against God." Where, after describing "who they are that may be ranked among the number of the enemies of Christ," he says, *p.* 413. "I take notice of a few breaking engines, that this mighty breaker has at hand, wherewith he can reach a blow unto them." Upon this head they tell us, in too facetious a manner for such a serious subject, "the reader will find the following catalogue of the breaker's breaking engines." These clinking words, "breaker's breaking engines," though cited by them as the author's, yet, as they stand, are none of his, but seem to be laid by themselves in a sportive manner. However, they give a simple enumeration of the breaking engines. "He has a breaking arm;" (follows immediately), "Who has an arm like God? His right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory," (*Psal.* xcvi. 1.): "A breaking countenance;" (follows), "When he frowns—who is able to bear it?" *Psal.* lxxx. 16. "They shall perish at the rebuke of thy countenance:" "A breaking word;" (follows directly), "Is not my word a—hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (*Jer.* xxiii. 29.). And so every one of the rest of these awful engines are vouched from apposite scriptures. So much in vindication of the theology in these sermons.

With reference to the *style*, the *Reviewers* say, *p.* 37. that it is in their 'opinion most indecently familiar in many places. We shall only instance (say they) in one passage out of many which evidently falls under this censure, *viz.* in *p.* 100. where the author represents our blessed Saviour as making the following *parody* on *Psal.* xl. 8. *I delight to do thy will, &c.; q. d.* "I consent to it, I am heartily willing and content, a bargain be it; let it be registrated in the volume of thy book; *i. e.* let it be entered into the records of heaven, and an extract thereof be given out in the scriptures of truth unto sinners of mankind, that they may have their thoughts about it."—Whoever was the composer of this article, let himself, and every one he is connected with, be judge, if it is gentlemanly, if it is charitable, or if it has the least degree of justice and equity in it, to palm upon the author, now when he is dead, what is well known through the whole kingdom he utterly abhorred while alive; even nothing less than a representing our blessed Saviour as making a *parody* (that is, a burlesque or mock) of the scripture. It had been more candid, if they had said in plain terms, the author was a *blasphemer*; for nothing can be greater blasphemy, than to represent the great God our Saviour as sporting with his own word. After all, though some of the above phrases be somewhat *homely*, (for instance, A bargain be it), it is referred to the judicious and impartial, if they are not so far remote from *blasphemy*, that they cannot even be branded with being *indecently familiar*, or any way unbecoming the glorious speaker in that text. And if it is considered, that the author, on this head, is shewing that the "proposal of a marriage with a bride of *Adam's* family, was graciously received and entertained by the Son of God before the world was;" it may be referred likewise, if the above paraphrase,

paraphrase, as it stands, is not the scope of the place. Besides, if there are some superfluities and inaccuracy of *style* in this *collection*, it must be remembered, that it is a posthumous work, originally composed without any view to the *press*; and though the manuscript, when extended in long hand, might be read to the author, when he was upon a lingering deathbed, yet he was in no capacity to revise it with his own hand, as he did other sermons published in his lifetime. Mean while, it may be offered as an apology for their speaking so contemptuously of his style, that they justify the "observations" of a young clergyman (art. 8.) as "very worthy the attention of that Reverend body to whom they are addressed." Among which observations this is one, "That several of *David's* Psalms are no way fit to be used (in public praise) by us, who live under a dispensation of religion so much more benign and peaceful than that under which they were composed.—It were pity but we were provided with a smooth and spirited translation of the rest of these sacred songs; our present one being for most part miserably harsh and heavy." When they approve of stigmatizing our translation of the Psalms in metre as *miserably harsh and heavy*, though it has been of public authority in this church upwards of an hundred years, it is no wonder at all they so severely censure Mr *Erskine's* style.

Their third ground of quarrel with this collection of sermons is, "the spirit of the Seceders," which, say they, p. 37. "appears to differ somewhat from the genuine temper and spirit of Christianity." The specimens they give hereof are, p. 279. of the sermons, where he says by way of *lamentation*, "If the plant of renown were flourishing in the land, there would not be so many unfavoury plants allowed to grow, or come up in his vineyard, as there are at this day. The plant of Popish idolatry is connived at, and the plant of Prelacy, error, and superstition, tolerate, &c.; the plant of unsound professors of divinity, poisoning our fountains of learning, &c.; the plant of lax erroneous ministers and preachers, &c.—These ministers, says he, p. 267. must be the devil's ministers, and not the ministers of Christ, who, instead of preaching a crucified Christ, entertain their hearers with harangues of Heathen morality, flourishes of rhetoric, the doctrine of self-love as the principle of religious actions, and the like stuff." And, in p. 429.—"some are attempting to pull down the standard of doctrine, particularly by denying the self-existence and supreme Deity of the Son of God; others are attempting to strike at the government of the church, by a tyrannical and lordly usurpation of the rights of the Lord's people in chusing their own pastors, &c."—Now, the question is, If these are real facts? If they are not, let the contrary be made appear. If they are, as, alas! their notoriety is too evident, wherein doth it differ from the *genuine temper and spirit of Christianity*, to lament, and testify against them? The scripture says it doth not. *Is. lviii. 1. Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sin. Jude v 3. —Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*

And there is an act of assembly, (*Aug. 1648*), "for censuring ministers
" for their silence, and not speaking to the corruptions of the times."
But this author being, it seems, of a contrary opinion, both to the
scriptures and the foresaid assembly, thinks that the *genuine temper* and
spirit of Christianity disposes a man to utter silence about these matters.

They conclude with a satirical invective upon the whole of these discourses, that they are "but little calculated to promote that reformation of manners, which ought to be one great object of every preacher's attention: on the contrary, they are so full of childish conceits and fancies;—there is so little morality, and such a peevish and ill-natured spirit to be found in them, that—they seem to be rather calculated to do harm than good; to expose religion to contempt and ridicule, instead of recommending the love and practice of it." This *peevish* and *ill-natured* reflection, is a further discovery of the *moderate clergyman* above mentioned. But whether to argue, "from the particular situation of the world, at the time of our Saviour's appearance, in respect of its political, moral, religious, and domestic state;" and to shew, "that the advantages which the world, in each of these views, derived from Christianity, were many and seasonable," particularly the—"humanity introduced into the trade of war,—the mildness and humanity of modern manners," and the like; whether a discourse of this kind be "a very proper specimen of the great improvement that has been made in the art of preaching in this part of the united kingdoms," as is asserted in the conclusion of *article 7. of the Review*? or, if it would not be as good, or even a far better *specimen* of the improvement of this *art*, as they call it; and of more substantial benefit to mankind in general, to *argue* from the original and universal corruption of man's nature, his utter impotency for actions spiritually good; from the necessity of the imputation of the surety-righteousness, and of the life of faith as the foundation of a life of holiness, as is done in the above collection of sermons? must be left to others to judge.

Upon the whole, it is presumed that Mr *Erskine's* character and memory will not be much impaired, from the reproach and contempt cast upon his posthumous works by the authors of this *Review*, if they are gentlemen of the *principles* above described: and if they deviate as far from their plan in their subsequent *numbers*, as they have done in this, it is not likely the nation will reap great *benefit* by the *success* of their work.

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